

**Strategic & Finance Committee meeting  
Held on 26<sup>th</sup> June 2025 at 6 pm at Brixington Primary Academy  
Draft Part I Minutes**

**Present:** A Walmsley (chair), P Walker (CEO), M Williams and A Denner

**In attendance:** M Platten (DoF) and I Candy (Co Sec)

**Quorum:** the meeting is quorate

**Circulation:** Directors (through GovernorHub), FFT website

	Decision		Action due
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<b>1. Welcome &amp; apologies</b>		
Apologies were received from I Thomas (work commitments).		
<b>2. Declaration of Conflict of Interests</b>		
Declarations of conflicts of interests were invited by the chair. None was made.		
<b>3. Minutes of the last meetings of the S&amp;F committee</b>		
<b>3.1. To approve the minutes of the last meeting (8 May 2025)</b>		
The draft minutes of the last meeting were circulated ahead of this meeting. The minutes (Part I and Part II) were agreed to be an accurate record of the last meeting and signed by the chair.		
<b>3.2. To review matters arising not otherwise on the agenda</b>		
The list of matters arising was circulated ahead of the meeting. The following matters were raised and discussed: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Church Lease (Marshwood): P Walker will follow this up with PHP to get an update on whether this has progressed.</li> <li>Ownership of cybersecurity: P Walker and M Platten will cover this in the interim as they are already involved with RM around filtering &amp; monitoring systems, upgrades of broadband, and the automatisisation of systems e.g. the recognition of staff accounts.</li> </ul>		<b>Appendix 1</b>  <b>P Walker</b>
<b>4. To receive and discuss the CEO report, to include:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Update on structures</li> <li>Update on potential growth</li> </ul>		
The CEO report and 2025-26 FFT structure were circulated ahead of the meeting. The meeting went into Part II to discuss the proposed 2025-26 FFT structure and growth. The meeting went back into Part I.		
<b>5. To review and discuss the Director of Finance (DoF) report, to include:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>April 2025 management accounts</li> <li>Update on budget for 2025-26 onwards</li> </ul>		
The DoF report, draft 2025-26 budget, budget monitoring report, and April 2025 management accounts were circulated ahead of the meeting. <u>April 2025 management accounts:</u> M Platten (DoF) highlighted that:		<b>Appendices 1-4</b>

- The April 2025 management accounts for the 29 schools showed the Trust in-year deficit was £88K, which was better than expected and holding the trend of an improving performance. This was linked to additional after-school income, nursery income, and not replacing TAs.
- The team was now predicting a £300K in-year deficit by the end of August which was a significant improvement on what was expected.
- The Trust had £1.36M in reserves at the start of the year. With the in-year deficit now predicted, the Trust would retain just about £1M in reserves by the end of the financial year, which was about 3.1% of income. Whilst that was below the DfE 5% threshold, that was better than expected.
- Had the Trust received the amount of TCAF budgeted for, the Trust would have broken even.
- Forecasting was done relatively prudently which meant that the situation may be better. However, the position was due to deteriorate at the end of the financial year because of the increase in support staff salaries and increase in employer NI contributions.
- Some schools were over their set budgets, for example Chickerell, which was the school with the highest deficit although it had improved.

**The committee asked for an update on staff pay awards.**

Unions were content with the value of the pay award but less content with the funding for it. The consultation about the pay award for teachers was due to end shortly and this should allow the agreed increment effective from September to be paid in the September pay packet, earlier than in previous years.

For support staff, the average proposed pay increase was 3.2% but two out of three unions were rejecting the offer. The increase was likely to have a £100K impact for the Trust if it matched the teachers' one. The government was looking at re-establishing the pay body for support staff.

It was positive to have pay increase figures available before the budget needed to be approved by the trust board.

2025-26 draft budget:

The DoF highlighted that the main changes to the previously circulated draft budget were as follows:

- The most significant change was the impact of the teacher pay award grant offset by the higher staff costs (resulting in an improvement of approximately £140K from the previous estimate)
- There was an income reduction linked to having fewer PP pupils, although the number was likely to increase with the autumn increase in PP funding.
- The Trust would also benefit from some nursery grants. Whilst the Trust may be able to secure more of those, that was not included in the budget as it was not certain.
- The high needs income has dropped down slightly but that was matched by a reduction in TA costs.
- Non staff cost changes were mostly driven by utilities savings. The Trust had a third-party supplier for utilities and were in a fixed contract until the end of August in most schools. Utilities prices had been fixed at a high level because that had been done several years ago when costs were particularly uncertain and high.

The DoF recommended the Trust looking at using the DfE scheme for utilities, because the DfE were proactively managing low costs although the price would be variable and this would be a compliant procurement approach because it was part of a framework. This would also save the costs of a procurement exercise. In addition, this approach had often been mentioned as securing significant savings in the sector. The Trust would need to join the scheme within the next few weeks, with costs being aligned to the scheme from April 2026. Both the DoF and the chair were aware that other trusts were adopting this approach because of the positive impact of the bulk buying power of the DfE.

<p>The committee agreed that the Trust would investigate this further and the approach would be approved via a written resolution once more information was available.</p> <p>The DoF further highlighted that the draft 2025-26 budget included one-off costs, such as the Moxton review and also the change of IT support provider whose costs were higher at the start of the contract. It also included staff reductions linked to pupil reductions. The Trust was looking at holding the cost of supply down but there would be less flexibility for schools to cover short term absence with TAs due to the reduction in the number of TAs. If more EHCPs were granted, the Trust would need to recruit more TAs for the same reason. There were some potential reductions in central costs, e.g. the cost of the employee assistance programme, and some opportunities in income and growth, so the Trust was looking at an improving picture over time and a three-year budget would be presented to the trust board for approval at their July meeting.</p> <p>The committee discussed that the Trust could potentially be a target of the recently announced programme of DfE regional director intervention around reserves. There would also be scrutiny over the entire three-year budget so it was positive to hear that this was expected to show an improving situation. The chair indicated that he would provide information to the vice-chair ahead of the trust board meeting as he would not be able to attend the meeting. The committee noted that it was unlikely the trust board would need to review the budget after the July meeting as situation was much clearer in terms of known factors than at the same time last year.</p> <p>A report summarising the use of the 2025-26 SCA was circulated at short notice on day of the meeting.</p> <p>The DoF highlighted that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Approximately £111K had been carried forward (as the funding is allocated from March to April).</li> <li>• Smaller, necessary projects were being approved as they were below the threshold for the committee approval.</li> <li>• There were still some large projects which were likely to take the majority of the funding. The replacement of Newton Ferrers roof would be financed over two years.</li> <li>• The cost of the Sidmouth project was above the DfE grant but there remained some value engineering to be worked on, so the Trust was unlikely to have to pay a significant amount for the building project itself but may need to pay for furniture.</li> <li>• The Trust should have ability to invest in IT too.</li> </ul>	<p>M Platten / SFC</p> <p>Appendix 5</p>
<p><b>6. To receive an update on key operations matters</b></p>	
<p>The CEO and DoF reported that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The new MIS implementation has gone well, with few issues. The Trust was now looking at additional modules which may provide savings over time for products such as parent payment and performance management.</li> <li>• Two months into the contracts with RM, there were a few things that were not as the Trust current team would expect. For example, some orders were placed for items that the Trust had some contracts still in place for a period of time. Whilst the contract was broadly working fine, there were some aspects that needed improving or were taking longer than expected. Moxton had been useful around those. The CEO and DoF had made clear where the Trust has concerns and where things could be improved. In some instances, it was helpful to bulk buy and that helped to recoup the costs of existing contracts, but some things had been rolled out in a way that was not logical. Conversations had also been held to clarify the Trust expectations, for example around the setting of new devices.</li> </ul>	

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The catering and cleaning contracts were the next large procurement exercise.</li> </ul>	
<b>8. Policies and compliance, to include a review the Trust risk register</b>	
<p>The reviewed electronic signature policy was approved by the committee.</p> <p>The committee welcomed the useful documents about the recent updates of the Academy Trust Handbook and Academy Trust Governance Guides. The committee noted the intention of the CEO to review all HR policies to be submitted for approval at the next meeting of the committee.</p> <p>The committee agreed to postpone the review of the Trust risk register until the audit &amp; risk committee had met.</p>	

Meeting times: start: 6 pm, end: 7.25 pm

Date of next meeting: TBC

**These minutes are agreed by those present as being a true record.**

**Signed:**.....  
 Chair of S&F committee

**Date:**.....